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A wider Route 30 highway discussed

MORRISON – Three congressmen are encouraging Illinois to move on its plans to widen U.S. Route 30 from Rock Falls to Fulton.

Last week, they sent a letter to Paul Loete, the new district engineer for the state Department of Transportation's Dixon office.

"This project has broad public support and is critical to job and economic growth in both northwest Illinois and eastern Iowa," said Reps. Bobby Schilling, R-Colona, Don Manzullo, R-Egan and Dave Loebsack, D-Mount Vernon, Iowa.

They said the two-lane U.S. 30 is not equipped to handle existing traffic levels, calling the 20-mile stretch of road unsafe. In 2010 alone, they said, this portion of U.S. 30 saw 107 accidents.

The proposed four-lane project has received \$8.2 million in federal and state dollars for design and engineering. It is a high priority for the region, the congressmen said.

The first phase involves an environmental study, said Becky Marruffo, a project engineer with the Department of Transportation.

Now, the department is doing a supplemental environmental impact study because of flood plain mapping changes, she said.

The agency plans to finish that document next year and hold a public hearing in early 2014, Marruffo said.

The project is not included in the 6-year funding program that lasts through 2018, she said.

"Projects do get added to the program," she said.

The state is looking at alternative routes, including those north and south of Morrison.

In 2008, the City Council endorsed the southern route. Mayor Roger Drey has said the council chose that route because it would fit better into the city's long-term comprehensive plan, while a northern route would be "detrimental to orderly growth."

Some business owners in Morrison fear they'll lose customers if the state pushes traffic outside of town. The state says it will try to lessen any problems for businesses resulting from a bypass, but has conceded that some will suffer.

If the state doesn't build the bypass, U.S. 30's in-town traffic is expected to increase from up to 11,000 cars a day in 2009 to 12,000 in 2018, the state says.

If the state builds a bypass south of town, in-town traffic on the business route would plunge to 5,800 cars a day, according to the state.

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